

TV and Radio

Ch. 5 sweeps 11 p.m. news ratings

By Frederic M. Biddle
GLOBE STAFF

WCVB's newscasts remain the region's most popular, according to the February ratings sweeps, but what's more impressive is that Ch. 5 won the hotly contested 11 p.m. local newscast race despite the lead-ins of its network, ABC, whose prime-time schedule sagged.

Meanwhile, archrival WHDH (Ch. 7) couldn't carry the momentum of an NBC prime-time sweeps-month victory, propelled by series blockbusters "ER" and "Friends" and such miniseries as "Gulliver's Travels," into its own newscasts. Although NBC has made Ch. 7 the area's most-watched station overall, and Ch. 7 has increased viewership of its own newscasts while numbers are eroding at its rivals, "Ch. 5 still has bragging rights to [being] No. 1" in newscasts, concedes Mike Carson, Ch. 7's general manager.

With one day's viewership yet untallied, Ch. 5 drew a 9.5 rating/20 share for its 11 p.m. newscast last month, on a seven-day basis, vs. an 8.7/19 for Ch. 7 and a 7/15 for WBZ (Ch. 4). (Each ratings point represents 21,000 television households; share is the percentage of in-use sets tuned into the rated station.)

WCVB also swept weeknight evening newscasts, with an 8.8/19 from 5 to 6 p.m., vs. a 7.3/16 for WHDH and a 3.9/8 for WBZ (all based on a five-day week). From 6 to 6:30, WCVB drew a 10.5/19, vs. WHDH's 8.4/15 and WBZ's 7/12 (Ch. 4's numbers reflect the whole 6-7 p.m. hour).

Altered 'UFO' airs on 'Nova'

► While politicians spin this week's primary results, combatants on both sides are spinning their takes on a "Nova" documentary about alien abductions that aired Tuesday.

"Kidnapped by UFOs?" was re-

edited prior to broadcast after objections were raised by Harvard psychiatrist John E. Mack. Mack, who had seen a preview version, is the controversial author of a book about abductees and one of the movement's highest-profile apologists. He appears prominently in the film, though not in a flattering light. Mack threatened to sue WGBH last Friday if changes were not made in the finished product.

In a statement released yesterday, Mack attorney Eric MacLeish detailed the changes that "Nova" made, most pertaining to a segment on Donna Bassett. Bassett was described in the original version as a writer who "smelled a story" and posed as an abductee to expose Mack. In the recut version, the "writer" appellation is gone. Altered, too, is a scene shot at the Charles Hotel, where Bassett and her husband first met Mack. As the edited version makes clear, Mack conducted hypnosis sessions with Bassett in his Cambridge office, not the hotel, and in the presence of a third party, not alone. A letter from Bassett to Mack was also recharacterized after Mack's objection.

"There was a very strong innuendo in the preview tape that something inappropriate - possibly sexually inappropriate - took place in this hotel room," said MacLeish, adding that Bassett should have been dropped altogether after Mack presented evidence undermining her credibility to WGBH officials. According to MacLeish, legal action is still being weighed.

In a brief statement earlier this week, WGBH acknowledged Mack's "many strong objections" to the show but insisted it had "not acceded to Dr. Mack's demands" in recutting the film. With "the exception of a handful of minor word changes made to avoid the possibility of misinterpretation," the station said, it "stands behind" the film as aired.

"Nova" producers declined further comment yesterday. A repre-

sentative did say it was not unusual for a documentary to be re-edited between preview and broadcast.

JOSEPH P. KAHN

'Around the Globe'

► Here's what's happening on "Around the Globe" today on New England Cable News:

■ 10 a.m.: Today's Paper - Karen Avenoso on Boston School Superintendent Thomas Payzant's pressure on his school principals.

■ Noon: Top stories - Thomas Palmer on the MBTA's plan to cut jobs.

■ 4 p.m.: Talk - Richard Chacon on the city's plans to deal with the crowds on Marathon Day. Call with questions, 244-3344.

■ 5 p.m.: Top stories.

■ 6 p.m.: Tomorrow's Paper - updates and tomorrow's top stories.

Schedule is subject to change.

THE TALK OF THE DIAL

Noon WMSX (1410 AM) - That's Life with Mark Snyder. Guest is comedian Jackie Mason. Also, author Mark Bego discusses the Grammy awards.

1 p.m. WMSX (1410 AM) - The Mindy Jackson Show. Guest Cathy Goldfarb talks about the growth of the Elderhostel program. Also, Dr. David Reardon tells why legal abortions will soon become rare.

8 p.m. WBZ (1030 AM) - The David Brudnoy Show. Guest is financial planner Jonathan Pond. Also, Stuart Schneiderman discusses the politics of shame.

OTHER RADIO HIGHLIGHTS

8 a.m. WGBH (89.7 FM) - The music of Gioacchino Rossini, who has a leap-year birthday.

2 p.m. WMBR (88.1 FM) - Changes with Fred Bouchard. The show celebrates "leap beats": 5/4, 6/4, 7/4. Guest is saxophonist Pharoah Sanders.

9 p.m. WCRB (102.5 FM) - WCRB Film Notes. Music from "Immortal Beloved," "War and Peace" and "The Natural."